

202 The People Superior to the King.

Question three: May subjects resist a prince who oppresses the State ? Our author unhesitatingly answers in the affirmative. God hath appointed kings, but it is the people who establishes them. Kings hold their sovereignty under God from the people. It is from God, but by the people and for the people that they reign. Let them not imagine that they are of higher race than other men. They are not lords of a flock of sheep or a herd of oxen. This, too, is attested by Scripture. The kingship in Israel was not hereditary, but elective. It is also attested by history. The Roman kings were elected, and though the elective origin of the kingship has been obscured by hereditary succession in more modern nations, it is still apparent in the fact that the heir to the crown is not, properly speaking, king till he has taken the coronation oath at the hands of the representatives of the people, as in Spain, France, England. These are as much kings by election as is the emperor, or the King of Bohemia. Kings, in a word, are created, not born. If the next heir is unworthy, the people may displace him by some other prince of the blood. The whole body of the people is superior to the king, for it is from the people that he derives his power. No usurpation can prejudice its right, or alienate liberty. Kings die, but the commonwealth is immortal. Its rights never die, and no modern king can claim more than his ancestors obtained. If he does he is a thief, and if the peers and chief officers of the kingdom have granted more, their action is treason to the people and does not justify tyranny, or legitimate the loss of liberty. A conspiracy of the magistrates to subject the people is as indefensible as the betrayal by a perfidious advocate of the interests of his client. There is one prescription which carries it above all others, viz., that the people be maintained in the enjoyment of their property and their liberty. Liberty is the privilege of nature, and no people would ever establish a king to rob it of this privilege. Kings were established to maintain justice, defend the State, and protect its members from outrage. The kingship is not an honour but a duty, a burden which consists in protecting the poor from the rich, and the nation from foreign enemies. This is the true secret of its origin, and all kings who pursue their own ends, not the interests of the people, are tyrants. It